**Structured Small Group Program**

Lauren Soderstrom

**Title**

Circle of Friends

**Goal/ Purpose**

There are two goals for this small group program.

* Eighth grade female students will be able to develop social skills in order to initiate new friendships within school.
* Students will be able to use strategies to assist them in maintaining current healthy friendships within and outside of school.

**Population**

The group is for female 8th grade students who have exhibited low levels of social skills during the past year, which has resulted in difficulty forming and maintaining friendships. None of the students in the group will be actively aggressive or violent towards other students in school.The group will serve up to 8 participants.

**Rationale/ Need**

A students’ level of social skills can influence academic performance, relationships, the quality of the school environment, and school safety (National Association for School Psychologists, 2002). Social skills school counseling groups have been shown to be effective for middle school students to develop social skills (Hayes, 2001, p. 16). Due to these two researched-based facts, and Battle Creek Middle School’s mission of promoting student academic success (Battle Creek Middle School, 2012), it is suitable to determine the need for a social skills group in the school. The need for a group focusing on social skills for 8th grade girls is based on three sources: a school counselor-developed needs assessment given to teachers, school record data regarding female student offenses against other students, and teacher classroom behavioral records.

The two existing data sources (school record data and classroom behavioral records) were collected from current and previous year school records. Both sets of data were analyzed to determine if there is a high incidence (as compared to other schools or district norms) of female student fights and aggressive incidents. Results showed the existence of a normative need as compared to other district and school data. Specifically, incidences of female fighting were 15% higher than other schools in the district. The current data sets were also compared to the previous year data sets to determine if there had been an increase in aggressive incidents and problematic classroom behaviors. Results showed a 30% drastic increase in female incidents of fighting.

The third data source was a school counselor-developed needs assessment. The needs assessment consists of a student survey of all middle school students at Battle Creek Middle School. The survey, adapted from the middle school student survey needs assessment used in Shelby County schools in Tennessee, involves 11 multiple choice items in which students can finish sentences regarding their need for assistance in the three domains of counseling (personal, academic, and career), as well as the status of their current relationships with others (Shelby County, 2012). Students are allowed to answer more than one choice on each item. The surveys were handed out in the students’ home rooms and collected directly by the school counselor from each home room. Then, all surveys were analyzed to determine the items that students request assistance with the most. The method of analysis was a ranking scale. Results showed a student felt need to improve relationships and social skills. This need was most apparent in regards to female 8th grade students. The student survey needs assessment is included in Appendix A.

**Theoretical Orientation**

For this group, the counselor will use solution-focused brief therapy. This type of therapy, based on solution-focused theory, is developmentally appropriate for 8th grade students as well as highly motivating due to the fact that it focuses on a student’s strengths instead of their weaknesses (Corey, 2012, p. 438). Instead of using negative restrictions (ex: stop fighting), solution-focused therapy helps the student set up positive goals (ex: learn how to actively listen) (p. 438). Franklin, Moore, and Hopson (2008) found solution-focused brief therapy to be effective in improving internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in a school setting. Additionally, this type of therapy is very time-effective, which can be highly useful for professional school counselors (Corey, 2012, p. 437).

The main technique used in solution-focused therapy is questions (p. 434). The counselor for this group will focus on the use of open-ended questions in order to elicit member interaction and deeper processing. Another type of question that will be used is exception questions that help focus on the times when problems did not occur due to a student’s problematic behavior (p. 434). Scaling questions will also be used to help students see the progress they make (p. 436). Finally, there will be many instances of group leader positive feedback to members (p. 437) in order to provide positive motivation.

**Ethical. Legal, and Multicultural Issues**

Before any student enters into group work, a signed informed consent form, included in Appendix B, will be obtained from their parents. This informed consent will include the nature and goals of counseling, the voluntary nature of participation, information about the school counselor, the rights and responsibilities of the parent, and the limitations of confidentiality. The informed consent forms will either be distributed either in person by the school counselor or mailed to the parents directly. Due to the fact that this group consists of minors, it is important to note that they are not legally able to give informed consent. Additionally, each student’s individual counseling file is legally “owned” by the parent, which makes it possible for them to access counseling information on their child at any point. Therefore, it is imperative that no notes placed in the student file disclose any information about other group members. Furthermore, the student’s cultural background can have an influence on the student’s preferred method of communication and forming relationships. Therefore, the counselor will be aware of these cultural differences and take them into account when helping students apply acquired knowledge to their daily lives.

**Recruitment and Screening**

Recruitment will take place through two formats. First, a flyer will be posted on the school bulletin board 1 month before the group is scheduled to commence to inform students that a new counseling group focusing on making friends was being formed. The flyer would request that if students wished to be included in this group, they could contact the school counselor. Additionally, informal teacher interviews would take place in order to gain information about students who are exhibiting low social skills but are not physically aggressive.

This second method of recruitment is also a way to screen out individuals who are aggressive and therefore need more individualized counseling. Another part of the screening process would include behavioral assessments. After all possible group members are identified, students will take the student BASC which is a measure of behavior. This will take place during the student’s study hall and in the counselor’s office. Additionally, teachers will be asked to fill out the SSIS for students that they have adequate interaction with in order to assess their level of social skills. This will be done at an appropriate time of the day (ex: after students leave) and location (ex: closed door classroom) when the assessment will remain private and confidential.

If the BASC shows incidences of violent or aggressive behavior, students will be referred to individual counseling. If the SSIS does not show a low level of social skills, students will not be able to become group members.

**Structure**

This group is an eight session closed group that will be eight weeks in duration. Each session will take place for 50 minutes, from 1:00-1:50 pm. This period of time is during eighth grade study hall. The schedule is designed to prevent unnecessary absences from core curriculum classes. The sessions will be held once a week on Tuesdays in the counseling group room. The group will be offered twice a year.

**Core ASCA Standard(s)**

* PS:A1.5 Identify and express feelings
* PS:A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior
* PS:A1.8 Understand the need for self-control and how to practice it
* PS:A1.9 Demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups
* PS:A1.10 Identify personal strengths and assets
* PS:A2.6 Use effective communications skills
* PS:A2.7 Know that communication involves speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior
* PS:A2.8 Learn how to make and keep friends
* PS:B1.6 Know how to apply conflict resolution skills

**Core State Academic Standard(s)**

Minnesota State Academic Standards for Language Arts

* 8.7.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
* 8.9.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
* 8.9.6.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts, audiences, tasks, and feedback from self and others, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

**Objectives**

* Students will be able to identify and express their feelings in group discussions about friendship situations (PS:A1.5, 8.9.1.1)
* Students will gain knowledge on appropriate and inappropriate behavior in regards to conflict, anger, and self-control (PS.A1.6)
* Students will be able to identify their strengths in making friends and their areas in need of improvement (PS:A1.10)
* Students will be able to complete a role play exhibiting positive conflict resolution skills (PS:B1.6)
* Students will write narratives about the kind of friend that they want to be to others (8.7.3.3).
* Students will apply knowledge learned to initiate conversations with potential friends outside of group (PS:A2.8)
* Students will give positive feedback to other students in group during group discussion (8.9.6.6)

**Program Evaluation**

There will be three methods used to evaluate this group program. Students will complete the BASC after the group is over to determine any difference in behavior. Teachers will also submit another SISS for their particular student one month after the group has ended to determine changes in social skills. Additionally, students will take a pre-test during the pre-session interview in regards to all objectives (expressing feelings, knowledge of conflict resolution skills, etc.) and a post-test after the last session. Finally, many of the objectives involving participation and discussion will be assessed through counselor observation and a behavioral checklist for each student.

**Session 1**

**Title:** Getting to Know You (Session #1 of 8)

**Brief Summary of Session:** Counselor will introduce group topic, and students will introduce themselves to each other. Counselor will discuss the importance and issues regarding confidentiality. Students will play a “getting to know you” game. The group will collaborate to come up with a list of rules for behavior in the group.

**Theoretical Orientation:** Solution-focused theory

**Specific Group Technique:** Questioning, humor, positive feedback, linking

**Duration:** 30 minutes (This session is shorter than the subsequent sessions in order to not overwhelm students who are not used to being in group).

**Materials/ Media:** Poster board, markers, pencils, paper

**Core ASCA Standard(s):**

* PS:A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior
* PS:A1.9 Demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups
* PS:A2.7 Know that communication involves speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior

**Core State Academic Standard(s):**

* 8.9.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**Objectives:**

* Students will be able to collaborate to write a list of appropriate rules for the group.
* Students will be able to identify positive behavior in the group as compared to negative behavior in the group.
* Students will acknowledge the importance of participation in group discussions.

**Assessments**:

Due to the fact that this is the initial session of the group, there are no formal assessments. The teacher will assess student behavior through use of behavioral checklists for each student for participation and collaboration in the group.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

OPENING- Counselor will welcome students to group and introduce the group topic of making friends. Counselor will ask students to introduce themselves, including their name, one thing they like to do in their free time, and one thing they would like to learn about in group. Counselor will explain the importance of confidentiality and detail the reasons why the counselor would need to break confidentiality. Counselor will check for understanding or any questions.

WORKING- Counselor will ask students to take out a piece of paper and write down two things that are true about themselves and one thing that is not true. Students will crumple up their pieces of paper and throw them in the floor in the middle of the circle. Counselor will pick up the pieces of paper and read them one-by-one to see if students can guess who wrote them and which statement is not true. Counselor will then ask students to think about some good rules that they want for the group. Students will brainstorm as a group and collaborate until a set of rules is established. Students will write rules on a piece of poster board to be displayed in the group counseling room.

PROCESSING- There will not be much processing in this session, as it is the initial session.

CLOSING- Counselor will thank students for coming to group, review what they have done during the session, and assign “own” work.

**Homework/ Ownwork**:

Students will bring a journal to the next session. In the week between this initial session and the next session, students will journal about current friendships and what they think and feel about those friendships.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** It is very likely that students will exhibit resistance to participation. If this happens, the counselor will gently try to draw them out, but not be pushy. If a student is “over” sharing, the counselor will redirect the student.

**Session 2**

**Title: Dealing with Conflict (Session #4 of 8 sessions)**

**Duration:** 50 minutes (1:00-1:50 pm)

**Brief Summary of Session:** In this session, we will review homework from the previous session, and then focus on identifying positive and negative ways to deal with conflict situations. Strengths of individual students are highlighted and new homework is assigned.

**Theoretical Orientation:** Solution-focused theory

**Specific Group Technique:** Questioning, exception questions, focusing on strengths, feedback to members, eliciting communication between members

**Materials/ Media:** Famous conflict pair cards (found in Appendix C), markers, poster board, crayons/colored pencils, white paper

**Core ASCA Standard(s):**

* PS:A1.5 Identify and express feelings
* PS:A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior
* PS:A1.9 Demonstrate cooperative behavior in groups
* PS:A1.10 Identify personal strengths and assets
* PS:A2.6 Use effective communications skills
* PS:B1.6 Know how to apply conflict resolution skills

**Core State Academic Standard(s):**

* 8.9.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
* 8.9.6.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts, audiences, tasks, and feedback from self and others, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

**Objectives:**

* Students will be able to participate in discussion regarding conflict situations (PS:A1.9, PS:A2.6, 8.9.1.1)
* With another student, students will be able to identify positive ways to deal with conflict (PS:A1.6, PS:B1.6, 8.9.1.1)

**Assessments**: Counselor will use informal observation during both the pair work brainstorming activity and group conversation to assess that all students are contributing to the discussions.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

OPENING- Counselor will welcome students back to group. Counselor will review what was discussed during the previous session (which was the importance of active listening in conversations with friends). Counselor will ask students how their “own” work went during the past week in regards to practicing their active listening skills. Then, counselor will ask students to stand up at their seats for the opening activity. Counselor will give each student a slip of paper that includes one part of a famous conflict pair set of cards. Students will need to describe their card to each other in order to find the match to their card. When students find their match, students sit down next to their partner. Counselor asks students what the pairs have in common. Counselor introduces session topic: conflict.

WORKING- Counselor will ask students to brainstorm with partner three different ways that are positive ways to deal with conflict. Students will use markers to write these ideas on a communal piece of poster board. Counselor will ask students to explain what they wrote, and identify a time they have either seen or used the specific positive way of dealing with conflict. Counselor will give students paper and ask them to draw a shield. Counselor will ask students to divide the shield into six parts and write in the six most effective ways (in their opinion) of dealing with conflict from the poster board. Counselor will ask students to color in the ways they have dealt with conflict, even if they have only tried it once.

PROCESSING- Counselor will ask students to think of times when they have used effective conflict resolution skills. Counselor will ask students to think about how they felt as compared to when they have not dealt with conflict very well. Students share experiences.

CLOSING- Counselor will review what students learned/discussed, including effective ways to handle conflict and the feelings that are produced when conflict is handled well. Counselor will assign “own” work, and ask if there are any questions.

**Homework/ Ownwork**: Counselor will ask students to practice one of the “blank” sections from their shields during the week that they haven’t tried before.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** Students may exhibit resistance to general group discussion or discussion with partners. Counselor will monitor this and encourage students who are not participating to draw them out. If there is severe resistance, counselor will confront this and help the individual and the group process the reasons for the resistance. Students may bring up examples of conflict that are extreme (example, abuse they have witnessed or experienced). Counselor will redirect student and see student individually after group. Students may gossip about someone who is not in group that they have a conflict with. Counselor will acknowledge the students’ feelings about the conflict and gently remind them of the group rule of not using names of students outside the group.

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Appendix A

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT PERSONAL NEEDS SURVEY

# **Battle Creek Middle School**

Check the topics of most interest to you.

1. I need help in:

 Developing the best personality I can

 Understanding and liking myself better

 Developing self‑confidence

 Changing a particular behavior

 No help needed in the above areas

2. I need the most help with:

 Personal and social problems

 Understanding my abilities and aptitudes

 High school course selection

 Career planning

 No help needed in the above areas

3. I need help with:

 Making and keeping friends with persons my age

 Getting along with people who are different from me

 Learning to tell others how I feel

 Discussing personal problems and keeping confidences

 No help needed in the above areas

4. I need help in:

 Expressing my anger in acceptable ways

 Adjusting to my home situation

 Exercising self‑discipline

 Expressing my feelings in an acceptable manner

 No help needed in the above areas

5. I need help in:

 Communicating with others

 Improving relationships

 Adjusting to different teachers' expectations

 Improving relationships with my peers

 No help needed in the above areas

6. I need help in:

 Learning about counseling and guidance services at my school

 Becoming involved in school activities

 Becoming involved in community activities

 Adjusting to a new school situation

 No help needed in the above areas

7. I need help with:

 Improving my grades

 Taking notes

 Taking tests

 Learning about study skills

 No help needed in the above areas

8. I need assistance in:

 Making and keeping friends my age

 Meeting new people

 Learning to tell others how I feel

 Using self‑control

 Understanding myself

9. My relationships with most of my teachers are:

 Excellent

 Good

 Fair

 Poor

 Uncertain

10. My relationships with most of my friends are:

 Excellent

 Good

 Fair

 Poor

 Uncertain

11. My relationship with my parents/guardians is:

 Excellent

 Good

 Fair

 Poor

 Uncertain

Appendix B

**Battle Creek Middle School**

**Parent/Guardian Consent for Individual and Group School Counseling Services**

This is to inform you that your student, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, has been referred to the school counselor by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for concerns related to:

Academic \_\_\_\_\_ Behavior \_\_\_\_\_\_ Social \_\_\_\_\_\_ Personal \_\_\_\_\_\_

School Counselor will conduct counseling services via:

🞏Individual counseling 🞏 Small group counseling sessions

Topics to be covered during the counseling sessions may include one or more of the following:

🞏Emotional Concerns 🞏Academic Performance

🞏Behavioral Concerns 🞏Interpersonal Relationships

🞏Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Counseling sessions are generally 30-50 minutes. All counseling sessions will take place in the school building in an atmosphere that supports the confidential nature of the sessions.

**Confidentiality:**

It is the ethical and legal responsibility of the counselor to safeguard students from unauthorized disclosures of information given in the context of counseling sessions. Therefore, information revealed between the counselor and student during the counseling session is confidential. It is the counselor’s hope that the parent, teacher, and/or administrator be involved in the helping process while maintaining counselor-student confidentiality. The limitations to confidentiality include:

1. When student poses danger to self, others, or the property of others.
2. When counselor suspects abuse or neglect.
3. Upon authorization of parent/student.
4. Under court order.

In some circumstances school counselors may be required to breach confidentiality as a matter of school policy. These limitations will be discussed with students during initial counseling sessions. Also, in group counseling sessions, the importance of confidentiality is stressed but cannot be guaranteed between group members.

**Consent:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the contents of this informed consent.

(please print name)

I give my child permission to participate in the proposed counseling activities.

Parent/Guardian Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C

Famous Conflict Pairs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capulets | Montagues |
| Confederate Army | Union Army |
| Barack Obama | Mitt Romney |
| Israel | Palestine |
| Gandhi | British-ruled India |
| Justin Bieber | Paparazzi photographer |
| Team Edward | Team Jacob |